



The Faithful Steward

A Newsletter of the Holy Orthodox Church in North America

A Discourse in Iconography

by Archbishop John (Maximovitch)

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Iconography began on the day our Lord Jesus Christ pressed a cloth to His face and imprinted His divine-human image thereon. According to tradition, Luke the Evangelist painted the image of the Mother of God; and, also according to tradition, there still exist today many icons which were painted by him. An artist, he painted not only the first icons of the Mother of God, but also those of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul and, possibly, others which have not come down to us.

Thus did iconography begin. Then it came to a halt for a time. Christianity was cruelly persecuted: all that was reminiscent of Christ was destroyed and subjected to ridicule. Thus, during the course of the persecutions, iconography did not develop, but Christians attempted to express in symbols what they wished to convey. Christ was portrayed as the Good Shepherd, and also in the guise of various personalities from

pagan mythology. He was also depicted in the form of a vine, an image hearkening back to the Lord's words: "I am the true Vine.... ye are the branches" (Jn. 15:1, 5). It was also accepted practice to depict Christ in the form of a fish, because if one writes in Greek "Jesus Christ, Son of God,

Saviour" (Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ) and then groups together the first letter of each word, one discovers that one has written the Greek word Ἰχθύς, "fish." And so, Christians depicted a fish, thereby calling to mind these words which were known to those who believed in the Saviour. This



Saint John Maximovitch

Painted by Mirra Meylakh

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also became known to the pagans, and consequently the image of the fish was also held suspect.

When, following the victory of Emperor Constantine the Great over Maxentius, freedom was given to Christians, Christianity quickly transformed the Roman Empire and replaced paganism. Then iconography flourished with full force. We already see directives concerning iconography at the first ecumenical councils. In some church hymns, which today are still frequently used, mention is also made of iconography.

Now what are icons? Icons are precisely the union between painting and those symbols and works of art which replaced icons during the time of persecution. The icon is not simply a representation, a portrait. In later times only has the bodily been represented, but an icon is still supposed to remind people of the spiritual aspect of the person depicted.

Christianity is the inspiration of the world. Christ founded His Church in order to inspire, to transfigure the world, to cleanse it from sin and bring it to that state in which it will exist in the age to come. Christianity was founded upon the earth and operates upon the earth, but it reaches to Heaven in its structure; Christianity is that bridge and ladder whereby men ascend from the earthly Church to the Heavenly. Therefore, a simple representation which recalls the earthly characteristics of some face is not an icon. Even an accurate depiction, in the sense of physical build, still signifies nothing. A person may be very beautiful externally, yet at the same time be very evil. On the other hand, he may be ugly, and at the same time a model of righteousness. Thus, we see that an icon must indeed depict that which we see with our eyes, preserving the characteristics of the body's form, for in this world the soul acts through the body; yet at the same time it must point towards the inner, spiritual essence. The task of the iconographer is precisely to render, as far as possible and to as great an extent as possible, those spiritual qualities whereby the person depicted acquired the Kingdom of Heaven, whereby he won an imperishable crown from the Lord, for the Church's true significance is the salvation of man's soul. That which is on the earth perishes when we bring the body to the grave; but the soul passes on to another place. When the world comes to an end, consumed by fire, there will be a new earth and a new Heaven, as the Apostle John the Theologian says, for with the eyes of his soul he already foresaw the New Jerusalem, so clearly described in his sacred Revelation. The Lord

came to prepare the whole world for this spiritual rebirth. To prepare oneself for this new Kingdom, one must uproot from within oneself those seeds of sin which entered mankind with our ancestors' fall into sin, distorting our pristine, grace-endowed nature; and one must plant within oneself those virtues which they lost in the fall. The Christian's goal is to change daily, to improve daily, and it is of this that our icons speak.

In calling to mind the saints and their struggles, an icon does not simply represent the saint as he appeared upon the earth. No, the icon depicts his inner spiritual struggle; it portrays how he attained to that state where he is now considered an angel on earth, a heavenly man. This is precisely the manner in which the Mother of God and Jesus Christ are portrayed. Icons should depict that transcendent sanctity which permeated the saints. The Lord Jesus Christ is the union of all that is human and all that is divine; and when depicted in an icon, the Saviour must be painted so that we sense that He is a man, a real man, yet at the same time something more exalted than a man, that we not simply approach Him as we approach a visitor or an acquaintance. No, we should feel that He is One Who is close to us, our Lord Who is merciful to us, and at the same time an awe-inspiring Judge Who wants us to follow Him and wishes to lead us to the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, we must not turn away to one side or the other. We should not depict only the spiritual aspect of the saint, completely disregarding how he looked while alive on earth. This would also be an extreme. All saints should be depicted so as to convey their individual characteristics as much as possible—soldiers should be portrayed arrayed for battle; holy hierarchs in their episcopal vestments... It is incorrect to depict bishops of the first centuries vested in the sakkos, for at that time bishops wore the phelonion, not the sakkos, and yet this is not such a great error, for it is far better to make a mistake in what is physical than in what is spiritual, to ignore, as it were, the spiritual aspect.

However, it is far worse when everything is correct in the physical, bodily sense, but the saint appears as an ordinary man, as if he had been photographed, completely devoid of the spiritual. When this is the case, the depiction cannot be considered an icon. Sometimes much attention is spent on making the icon beautiful. If this is not detrimental to the spirituality of the icon, it is good, but if the beauty distracts our vision to such an extent that we forget what is most

important—that one must save one’s soul, must raise one’s soul to the heights of Heaven,—the beauty of the depiction is already detrimental. It cannot be considered an icon, but merely a painting. It may be very beautiful, but it is not an icon. An icon is an image which leads us to a holy, God-pleasing person, or raises us up to Heaven, or evokes a feeling of repentance, of compunction, of prayer, a feeling that one must bow down before this image. The value of an icon lies in the fact that, when we approach it, we want to pray before it with reverence. If the image elicits this feeling, it is an icon.

This is what our iconographers were zealous about—those ancient iconographers of the time before the conversion of Russia, of whom there were many, and our Russian iconographers, too, beginning with the Venerable Alypius of the Kiev Caves, who painted a number of icons of the Mother of God, some of which still survive. These wondrous icons, which continued the Byzantine tradition of the painting of icons which inspire compunction, were not necessarily painted in dark colors; frequently they were done in bright hues; but these colors evoked a desire to pray before such icons. The holy hierarch Peter, a native of Galicia who later became Metropolitan of Kiev and All Russia, painted icons, some of which were until recently to be found in the Cathedral of the Dormition in Moscow. An entire school of iconography was established in Novgorod under the direction of the holy hierarch Alexis of Novgorod, a whole series of whose icons have been preserved....

Unfortunately, this Orthodox movement as a whole started to collapse when Russia began to be infiltrated by Western influence. In certain respects, Russia’s acquaintance with the European West was very beneficial. Many technical sciences and much other useful knowledge came from the West. We know that Christianity has never had any aversion to knowledge of that which originates outside itself. Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom studied in pagan universities, and many writers, among whom were our spiritual authors and many of the best theologians, were well acquainted with pagan writers. The Apostle Paul himself cited quotations from pagan poets even in the Holy Scriptures. Nevertheless, not all that was Western was good for Russia. It also wrought horrible moral damage at that time, for the Russians began to accept, along with useful knowledge, that which was alien to our Orthodox way of life, to our

Orthodox faith. The educated portion of society soon sundered themselves from the life of the people and from the Orthodox Church, in which all was regulated by ecclesiastical norms. Later, alien influence touched iconography as well. Images of the Western type began to appear, perhaps beautiful from an artistic point of view, but completely lacking in sanctity, beautiful in the sense of earthly beauty, but even scandalous at times, and devoid of spirituality. Such were not icons. They were distortions of icons, exhibiting a lack of comprehension of what an icon actually is.

The purpose of this article is, first of all, to promote an understanding of the true icon, and secondly, to cultivate a love for the icon and the desire that our churches and our homes be adorned with genuine icons and not with Western paintings which tell us nothing about righteousness or sanctity, but are merely pleasant to look upon. Of course, there are icons painted correctly in the iconographic sense, but yet very crudely executed. One can paint quite correctly in the theoretical sense and at the same time quite poorly from a practical standpoint. This does not mean that, from the principle of iconography itself, these icons are bad. On the other hand, it happens that one can paint beautifully, yet completely ignore the rules of iconography. Both such approaches are harmful. One must strive to paint icons well in principle, method and execution. This is why we oppose certain people and their attempts to paint our churches, for they have the wrong approach, the wrong point of view. They may paint well, perhaps; but when the point of view is incorrect, when the direction is wrong, no matter how well the locomotive runs, it nonetheless slips off the track and is derailed. This is precisely what happens to those who execute their work technically and correctly, yet due to an incorrect approach and an incorrect point of view, they travel the wrong path.

Dismissal Hymn

Plagal of First Tone. Let us worship the Word

LIKE a spiritual daystar in heaven’s firmament, * thou didst encompass the whole world and didst enlighten men’s souls. * Hence, thy name is glorified throughout the East and West, * for thou didst shine forth with the grace * of the Sun of Righteousness, O John, our beloved shepherd. * Wherefore, cease not to entreat Christ, that He show mercy and redeem our souls.

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How each of us can and ought to serve the Church

By Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky

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If we love the Church, if She is dear to us, then how can each of us serve Her? How can we defend Her?

When Christianity came into being, it upset the major concepts dominant in the world, particularly the concept of power. Power, according to Christianity, seems to the world like impotence, like contemptible weakness, for Christian power is meekness. “Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.”

Without Christ and outside of the Church, one cannot pit meekness and humility against all the power and authority in the world and come out ahead. How is it possible to withstand the power of naked force or of a clever mind? But He Who was obedient even unto death on the Cross declared, “Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world.”

The meek Christian virtues are a mighty power—they are an artery by which the power of God comes down into the world. Most of the time we live and see the world through a veil, with worldly eyes. But when we draw back the veil, we see perspectives of eternity; with faith in the immortality of the soul, in eternal life, concepts are completely changed. Much that is great becomes of no consequence, and the insignificant becomes great. He who beholds the Kingdom of God with spiritual eyes is like a giant whose head reaches to the heavens and is full of the power of the Christian Faith.

So two contradictory laws of life stand one against the other, two kingdoms: the kingdom of the meek and the kingdom of the powerful. The kingdom of the meek wages war against the kingdom of power while in the midst of it. This is a constant struggle, and it is difficult for the Church. Even though we know that victory is on the side of the meek, the human elements of the Church often weaken. This is because, under the influence of discouragement and weakness of faith, those who serve the Church adopt worldly weapons—force, deceit, ambition, pride—instead of spiritual ones.

But the Church has been standing against the world for more than two millennia now. If meekness were not power, how would this be possible? We must remember that the power of the Church is not in numbers, and that in order to preserve inner strength, one should stand apart from the world.

So then, how should we serve Her? It is not only the ordained clergy who are called upon to serve the Church—we are all Her soldiers called to defend Her. The Church is meek and has need of protection and defense. In the present time the Church has no government or

emperor to defend Her. Now the care of the Church is entrusted to the people of the Church Herself, to each Orthodox Christian. In this regard we are returning to the times of the first Christians.

The power of service doesn't lie in our talents, our abilities, and callings. It is in our morality, in our living according to the law of the Gospel, according to the law of the Church. In this we look to monastics as examples. Those who think that prayer, fasting, temperance, ascetic labor, and the struggle with vices have the goal only of personal salvation, and that those who practice them have in themselves a kind of egoistic spirit, are gravely mistaken. But rather, internal work on oneself is an investment in the Church, a collecting of the Church's wealth, which does not consist in opulent church buildings or sonorous choirs, or even philanthropy, but in the moral life of the faithful.

We are all members of the one body of Christ, a single organism, the Church; and in working on ourselves, we work for the whole, for the entire Church and Her head, our Saviour. In neglecting our own soul, we bring harm not only to ourselves, but also to the Church. By not gathering for our own soul, we scatter what belongs to the Church.

We serve the Church in this way: that through our own personal Christian life the spirit of the Gospel flows into the life of the world, thus putting the enemies of the Church to shame. Our personal qualities contribute to the internal unity of the Church as a whole and of the parish in particular. Thus, a unique Church atmosphere is established—an atmosphere where a person feels he is in a special world, which gives joy and rest to his soul, refreshing and renewing it. In such an atmosphere, it is easier for the soul to open up to the breath of the Grace of God that abides in the Church. But if this atmosphere is absent; if within the Church there are divisions, discord, ambition, and self-love, then where is the power of the Church?

Therefore, the answer to the question of how we can serve the Church is simple: by active obedience to Her—by a life according to the rules of the Church, according to the moral laws of our Faith, zealous attendance at church services, prayer at home, and a Christian foundation in our home life. With all of Her members serving in this way, the Church can speak out in our Saviour's words “Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world.”

An Interview with Father Doctor Vassily

Where were you born, and what is your educational background?

I was born in Rio De Janiero, Brazil, the youngest of four boys. My father and mother, Paul Pavelovich and Olga Vassiliovna, were raised in China (Paul, at the St. Tikhon Orphange in Shanghai and Olga, in the large Russian emigre community in Harbin) and thereafter moved to Brazil, escaping the turmoil and hardship that the Russian community was enduring in China during the late 1940s. After living in in Brazil for 7 years, the family moved to the USA, settling in New York City in the mid 1950s. I received my primary and secondary education in the NYC public school system, and thereafter entered the Sophie Davis School for Biomedical Education—City University of New York, a 6 yr. B.S./M.D. program. In the early 1980s I completed my fellowship training in Allergy and Clinical Immunology at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children and Temple University (Philadelphia, PA), and started a private practice in 1986, Southern Maine Allergy Associates, where I continue to practice.

Describe your immediate family.

My wife and I were married by Bishop Gregory (Grabbe) of ROCOR in 1980 at the Synod Cathedral in NYC. She works as an R.N. with me at the allergy practice. We have four wonderful children: Katya, Paul, Tonya, and Sophia.

When and where were you ordained?

June 1/14, 2009, the Sunday of All Saints, at the Holy Dormition Church in Concord, NH.

Which bishop ordained you?

Metropolitan Ephraim. (Bishop Demetrius was also present and serving.)

Describe your parish and ministerial duties.

I currently serve most weekends with Fr. Andrew Snogren at Holy Dormition Church, receiving training in the services. I am also involved in cultivating and serving a small parish community in Maine, named after St. John Maximovitch of Shanghai and San Francisco. Services are currently conducted in our house chapel, with weekly reader's vespers services and Divine Liturgy served monthly with visiting clergy.

What does it feel like to be a physician as well as a clergyman? Do the two roles complement each other?

Each calling is driven by a spirit of service, a service to the physical needs of others, and a service to our Lord through His earthly Church. In that sense, the roles are complementary.



Newly-ordained Father Doctor Vassily is standing to the left of Bishop Demetrius

Report From Tbilisi, Georgia



Father Zurab and the parishioners in Tbilisi

Father Zurab writes that he has been reduced to the rank of “youth camp counselor” for the duration, and that the kids, whom he referred to as “grasshoppers,” are giving him a real run for the money. They play soccer until dark.

The old house, which the parish of the Dormition of the Theotokos used as a church, was on the verge of collapse when, in 2006, a helping hand came from our brothers and sisters in America. It is with their generosity that we were able to build this splendid church. But we did not stop at building the church, we even had it frescoed. The beautiful frescoes that can be seen in the altar were kindly executed by our Father Andrew Boroda, from St. Paul, Minnesota. We can only pray and hope that he should find time to adorn the rest of the church with frescoes that are done in the traditional Georgian style of his.

Despite many temptations, the Orthodox Church in Georgia continues to thrive. Besides Tbilisi, there are churches in Kutaisi, Guria, and a mission parish in Kakheti. At the moment, we do not have our local bishop and are under the omophorion of the hierarchs of the Holy Orthodox Church in North America. We thank God that we have such Orthodox confessing bishops and boldly commemorate in our services the names of Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston and of Metropolitan Makarios of Toronto.

May God save and protect every pious Orthodox Christian.

Photini, My Grandma

My grandmother's name was Photini, who, to my great surprise, was Greek. I asked myself how on earth it was possible even though I am Lebanese. So I started to search to find out the history behind it. After reading the Bible, I was able to find some clues: for reasons of faith and trade, many Greeks lived and settled in the areas near Antioch, and Eskandaroun next to Antioch, all the way south along the Mediterranean Sea to Jerusalem.

Photini married her husband Abboud, of Arabic descent, in the town of Eskandaroun. He later died in an automobile accident, leaving her a widow with three children, Nicholas, Alexander, and Katrina.

Nearby Antioch of ancient Syria (currently Turkey) is the site of the church of Agia Sophia, founded by the Apostles. This region was once called Great Syria before the French gave it to Turkey following World War I. After Turkey gained control of Great Syria

my grandmother feared persecution by the Turks, who had previously killed millions of Christian Greeks and Armenians. In fact, Turkish persecution started in her home town of Eskandaroun. Christians were ordered to "eshmil", which means that they were supposed to walk on the left like the animals. Her greatest concern was to protect her children.

She and my Uncle Costa fled to Lebanon in the 1940s because at that time the Lebanese president, Kamil Shamoun, a Maronite Christian was welcoming all Christian settlers to help create a balance in the population between Christians and Moslems. They sailed on an old ship to Lebanon, arriving at the cathedral of Saint Nicholas as refugees whose faith in Christ kept them going through this hardship.

Photini had a deep faith in Christ that enabled her to build a home for her three children and to raise them in the Orthodox Faith. I spoke to all that knew her, including my mother, who said that Photini was a woman of righteousness. She anticipated her death, and before she left this life she visited all her loved ones to see that they kept the true faith, to assure them God is merciful even with all of life's hardship, and that He is on the side of those who believe in Him. Then she said good night to us, slept, and the next day she was



in the hands of God.

God loves those who suffer for His cause, for which may she inherit eternal life.

Bechara Demien

“Sanctify them that love the beauty of Thy house...”

(from the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom)

Saint Joseph's Orthodox Christian Woodworking Shop was founded by the Fathers of Holy Ascension Skete in Cape Neddick, Maine, in 2008. The workshop has been donated a state-of-the-art array of power tools and the finest quality Swiss and German-made hand-carving tools, and occupies 750 square feet of the Skete's basement. The workshop specializes in building traditional hand-carved wooden Orthodox Church furniture, hand-carved shrines for principal icons, and hand-carved iconostases; the shop also makes a wide range of other church-related wooden articles, including chalices/patens, artophorions, hand-carved icons, reliquaries, hand-carved plates decorated with Orthodox designs, processional cross/fans sets and more. Customers are able to choose from pre-existing designs built by the Fathers or by others (subject to copyright restrictions), or can develop new designs in consultation with the Fathers. The following interview about the workshop was conducted in July with Priestmonk Menas, one of whose obediences at the Skete is doing the woodworking.

Faithful Steward: How did your Skete become involved in professional woodworking, Father?

Father Menas: It's a very long story, but to shorten it a little, it developed out of our own need to build an iconostasis and furnishings for our own chapel. The cost of buying high-quality, hand-carved furnishings either in Greece or in the United States was far beyond our means. So our Abbot, Archimandrite Adrian, enlisted David Ouellette, his brother, who is a woodworker, to help us build our own. David visited us from England where he lives, and I became his helper for the major woodworking projects, back in 2004 and 2006. We built our iconostasis in 2004 and two large shrines in 2006. We used power and hand tools gifted to us by a very dear Russian Orthodox lady in Pennsylvania, whose husband was a carpenter and had very sadly just reposed. On each of the two major woodworking projects, Father's brother David and I began working together, but David's visit ended before the project we were doing was finished, so he taught me all that was needed to complete it on my own. In addition, during his second visit, in 2006, David found a professional woodturner here in Portsmouth, NH, who agreed to teach me for God's sake at no charge how to turn wood on a lathe, as was required to make some parts of the shrines. Some pious people saw the work, and they offered to help us buy a small lathe and some other new power tools. Eventually, when they learned we had started doing this for our living, they offered to help us buy state-of-the-art power tools and fine hand-carving tools.

Faithful Steward: How did you learn to carve?

Father Menas: That's interesting. It began before I started a lot of the other woodworking. The beautiful professionally-carved frame for our Pochaevskaya was broken in two pieces during our move here in 2003. The smaller piece was lost in the move. Father Adrian was deeply grieved. And, you know how some things in life look very difficult to one person but look very easy to another, and vice-versa? When I looked at that frame and the missing area, I just thought, "There's nothing difficult about making a piece of wood look like that." So I found a piece of scrap wood in the basement and some X-acto knives and other things we had down there, and carved a replacement piece that looked just like the original. This led Father Adrian to invest quite a bit of money to send me to a carving course at the nationally-renowned North Bennett Street School in Boston, and to start buying real hand-carving tools. Then it was practice, practice, practice.

Faithful Steward: So woodworking isn't something you did before entering the monastery?

Father Menas: Whenever it happened that I came across carpentry or fine woodworking since childhood, I was very interested in it. And I pursued it by taking the industrial arts class in high school. But it was offered only one year and, although I loved it, there was no other opportunity in high school to pursue it, and because of my desire to go to college, it was not really practical to do anything more with it. I was taken up with school, sports, work, dating, etc. etc. etc. When Father's brother came here in 2004 and we went to the Woodcraft store in Portsmouth where they have so many kinds of tools, woods, and related things, I left "drooling" over how fun and interesting it would be to really get involved in this, but I also accepted the apparent reality that it was absolutely impossible and was simply one of the things the world has to offer that I had ruled out, by choosing instead to become a monastic. I recall particularly hearing one time that Father Ignatius at Holy Transfiguration Monastery had been a cabinetmaker before entering the monastery, and thinking how I wished I had been able to be a woodworker. I was more disappointed about not being able to do that than about retiring from law, sports, or anything else I had enjoyed in the world! You can imagine, then, how over the last couple years I have watched with great amazement how our Saviour, beyond any even faint hope or expectation of mine, brought about the Workshop. The people at Woodcraft in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and the national Woodcraft company in West Virginia have all been very generous and helpful toward us through these years, and we are personally very grateful to them. Now, without any exaggeration, right in our own basement we are blessed with one of the best-equipped small woodworking shops/carving studios

anywhere in the United States! I have continued to make various furnishings for our chapel, most recently a bishop's throne. Over the years I have become associated with several highly-accomplished professional woodworkers in Maine who have all instructed me without charge for God's sake how to do professional-class work. Eventually, early in 2008, Father Adrian and I felt that the quality of our work had progressed to the point that we could offer the woodworking to others on a professional basis.

Faithful Steward: How did the Skete support itself before the Workshop?

Father Menas: Before entering the monastery I was a lawyer handling civil litigation and appeals in particular. The work involved a lot of research and writing, and some law firms were still interested in having me work for them part-time while I lived in the monastery. Also, since we began in 1999, donations have contributed greatly to our ability to develop the Skete chapel and grounds, and to some extent also have helped to support us month to month.

Faithful Steward: Do you still do any legal work?

Father Menas: No, I don't. I have not done any legal work in over two years now. And we've had a couple fairly lucrative offers come along, but in consultation with Father Adrian, I have declined all of them. In an emergency, should we be faced with an absence of woodworking income, we would consider it, but the spiritual reality is that it is not recommended work for a monastic. It is not what I entered the monastery to do.

Faithful Steward: Why is that?

Father Menas: It requires complete mental concentration and so it is a barrier to prayer, to the continual communion with God that unceasing prayer makes possible for us and to other blessings that may flow from that. This is what I entered the monastery to pursue. And woodworking permits that. To be sure, quite a bit of mental concentration is required even by woodworking, but it does leave enough mental attention free for prayer while working. It is an extreme blessing for me to be able to do the woodworking rather than the legal work. We could make more money if I did legal work, but it is simply not worth it. I should mention as well, it is not because, as is so often jokingly commented, legal work is inherently dishonest or something like that. We see that great saints of the Church like Ambrose of Milan, Photius the Great, and John of San Francisco had legal careers or training before becoming monastics, and they were virtuous men at those times in their lives, if not already saints.

Faithful Steward: Has the workshop been busy since you started in business over a year ago now?

Father Menas: By the mercy of God, we have been literally overwhelmed. We have now completed two very large furniture orders, each of which took several months to complete. One includes a wide array of furnishings for our St. Seraphim of Sarov parish in Richmond, VA, and the other includes many pieces for our chapel of the Burning Bush in Mesa, AZ. We have also made many smaller articles for other parishes, monasteries, and lay people. Photographs of a small sampling of our work are going to be published with this interview, I understand.

Faithful Steward: Do you have a website? How can people who are interested in purchasing something contact you?

Father Menas: We do not have a website for several reasons. One is that, by God's grace, we have already been very busy with work through "word of mouth." Another is that an attractive, highly-professional website is expensive and time-consuming to develop, and we have been so busy that we have not been able to give website development the real attention it deserves. Also, websites often generate a lot of very casual inquiries that consume a lot of time but do not lead to a purchase. I learned this when I had a website for my legal practice; closer to this field, some professional iconographers have told me they find the same thing. People who are only curious could, for example, send me a photograph of a furniture piece and ask me to provide an estimate of the cost to make it. It might take me several hours to provide a reliable estimate that I can stand behind. Two or three such estimates a week would consume an entire workday. We do not have that time to give, especially when the person inquiring was never seriously interested to begin with. Between work, the daily services and prayer-rule, and the demands of my helping Father Adrian, who has had many problems with his health in recent years, it is very difficult to fit everything in a day. So, we feel it could be more detrimental than helpful to us. It may be that in time we will post a website, if necessity demands it. But our life in the Skete is hesychastic, and for that reason we have also avoided having a website for our Skete itself; nor are our services or workshop generally open to visitors. Father Adrian has in the past given a blessing for customers to visit in order to discuss various aspects of their orders, like the design of a furniture piece which can efficiently be worked out in a personal meeting. People who are considering ordering something can e-mail frmenas@maine.rr.com or call me at (207) 221-5641 to arrange a meeting or to discuss particulars.

Faithful Steward: Is there anything else you'd like to say?

Father Menas: Yes. We would very much ask everyone's prayers that our work will be pleasing to God, to the beauty of His House, and to the salvation of our souls.

Samples from St. Joseph's Woodworking Shop



Chapel—Holy Ascension Skete Iconostasis



Pochaev Icon Shrine



Kouvouklion—Overall Shot



Kouvouklion—Epitaphios Bed and Base Carving Detail



*Altar set—Chalice, Diskos, Artophorion for Great Lent.
Prosphora Bowl, Seraphim Angel in background*



Bishop's Throne



Crest and Finials of the Bishop's Throne



Side Panels of the Bishop's Throne

Synod Meeting in Portland



From May 8-10, the Metropolitan Cathedral of the Holy Nativity of the Theotokos hosted the Holy Eparchial Synod of the Holy Orthodox Church in North America (HOCNA). At the Liturgy on May 8, His Eminence Metropolitan Moses welcomed the visiting hierarchs, Metropolitans Ephraim of Boston, Makarios of Toronto, and Bishop Demetrius of Carlistle to Portland, OR. The proceedings culminated in a concelebrated Hierarchical Divine Liturgy on May 10, the Sunday of the Paralytic. The celebrant was the Ruling Hierarchy of the Portland Metropolis, Metropolitan Moses, with Metropolitan Makarios and Bishop Demetrius concelebrating. Also concelebrating were the Cathedral Clergy, Proastamenos Fr. Constantine Parr, Fr. Photios Cooper, Archdeacon Andrew, Master of Ceremonies, and Deacon George Psaromatis. His Eminence Metropolitan Ephraim presided in attendance. The Choir of Cathedral Chanters under the direction of Protopsaltis of the Metropolis of Portland, Mr. John Presson, chanted.

Have you seen our Church's Website?

Go to the articles section of www.homb.org

and look up

1. Rationalism and Fundamentalism—The Two Banes of Western Theology
2. Orthodox Christian Scriptures—Why Orthodox Christians prefer the Septuagint
3. Articles of Faith

Children Are Not Property

Edited from *Christian News*, June 15, 2009

A California court ruled that “parents do *not* have a constitutional right to home school their children Because parents have a legal duty to see to their children’s schooling within the provisions of these laws, parents who fail to do so may be subject to imposition of fines or an order to complete a parent education and counseling program.” The court even issued a threat to parents that they could lose custody of their children if they insist in teaching them at home: “the juvenile court has authority to limit a parents’ control over a dependent child” (*The Freeman*, May, 2008, p. 8).

(Note that this is a threat to take children away from their parents, on a dictatorial whim).

The dispute about the education of children has been going on for a long time. There have been private and parochial (church-sponsored) schools, and even home schooling. Since the United States Constitution does not delegate to the national government the education of the children, nor prohibit it to the states, it is “reserved to the states ... *or to the people*” (Tenth Amendment).

Parents have at times complained about some of what is being taught to their children.... Private and parochial school training and the choices of home-schoolers are usu-

ally not in line with the ambitions of [the irreligious] and there has been conflict between proponents of public school education and those who prefer to keep government out of their children’s education.

Our children in the public school system are there for education, not for indoctrination.

When dictators (Hitler and others) take over, the education of children is one of their first targets for control. Dictators want children trained and conditioned like robots, to think as the dictators choose, rather than to follow God’s Word, or even to think for themselves.

The Holy Scriptures urge that children be taught the right way when they are young, so they will stick to it when they grow up (Prov. 22:6). The Scriptures emphasize that the children learn God’s Word, and these instructions are addressed to parents with respect to their own children (Deut. 6:1-25).

When children attend government schools (or any school), it is still the duty of their parents to know what is being taught to their children, and to correct anything that is wrong. This means that the parents themselves need to know what is right and what is not, and to correct what is wrong, even if this means going against the “system.”

Your Dog Died

Many years ago, Bishop Danilo Krstitch of Serbia told the monks of Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Boston how resourceful and tactful the peasants from his country could be when they had to break bad news to someone. The following humorous, but also sad, story is an example:

A rich Serbian landowner had to leave his estate and travel abroad for some months. Upon his return to his fatherland, he was just entering his native village when he chanced to meet one of his hired hands. After the initial happy greetings and back-slappings were over, the master asked his servant how everything was back home.

“Fine. Everything is fine!” answered the servant. “Everyone is well, glory be to God! Oh, I forgot, there is just one bit of sad news. Your dog died.”

“What?,” exclaimed the master. “But it was so young and healthy when I left. That’s really too bad. Well, what can you do? What did it die of?”

“Well,” answered the servant thoughtfully, “it was not anything really serious, as I recall. I think it died when the horses stampeded.”

“The horses stampeded? Why, on earth, would the horses stampede?”

“Well, they may have gotten a little excited when the barn caught on fire.”

“What? The barn caught on fire?”

“Well, actually, it burned to the ground.”

“What are you telling me, my good man?” said the master, very agitated by now, as one might expect. “How did the barn catch fire, for Heaven’s sake?”

“I’m not sure, to tell you the truth. It may have been the live sparks and coals flying from the main house.”

“What!” cried the master, as he sank down onto a nearby chair, covering his face with his hands.

“Well, they said the curtains in the living room caught on fire from the candle stands,” said the servant rather awkwardly.

“Candle stands?” a questioning look came over the master’s face. “We don’t have candle stands in the living room!”

“If I’m not mistaken,” responded the servant, looking as though he really wanted to be somewhere else at that moment, “I think they were placed there to be near the coffins.”

Moral of the story: Try not to be the first servant to meet your master when he returns from a long trip.

Getting kids to turn off the television

A portion of an article, reprinted from *Christian News*, May, 18, 2009, with permission of the editor

Many studies reveal that behavioral problems exhibited by our school-age children and their epidemic obesity are proportional to time spent watching television or playing video games.

Fifty-five years ago when I was a kid, no one in my neighborhood had a television. After dark, we rode bicycles or played chase until our parents called us in at bedtime. No wonder there wasn't a single fat kid in our entire school. But, you can be sure that, when we had the 25 cents admission, we would all head off to the Saturday afternoon double feature downtown. What a thrill to see Tarzan wrestling an alligator or Godzilla tearing down the big buildings, and all in glorious black and white and scratchy sound.

Today, home theaters and computer games produce images, sounds and special effects that are awesome beyond anything we could have imagined, and it is constantly available in every home. I am sure I would have given up bicycle riding, wrestling, fishing and tree climbing if I could have watched the programming available today. But, what would I have become?

Every minute of a child's life is formative. A young adult is the product of all the minutes of his 18 years. And there has never been a more effective mentor than the TV. Some "so-called" experts say children are not significantly influenced, but the sponsors disagree to the tune of billions of dollars spent on advertisement.

Honorable, successful, hardworking adults are not born; they are made. Mental health is the product of an

active and meaningful life. Electronic entertainment is the avoidance of living. It provides a make-believe world where success is measured by all the wrong values. A child raised on Hollywood movies and video games is not learning to be successful, nor is he developing social skills, and he is certainly not living in the real world where success is purchased with responsible hard work.

But let's not throw the blame on the kids. It is not their fault. And parents today are not less caring or less vigilant than former generations. We are all victims of scientific advancements in electronics. We have evolved

from manufacturers of life into consumers of entertainment. It is irresistible, an instant fix for boredom. But boredom is the mother of creativity. We all try to partake in moderation, try to limit the time our children spend plugged in to Hollywood, but entertainment becomes an addiction, and then our master.

So, what is a parent to do? Passive entertainment has become a way of life. If we say to our children, "No more television or video games; read a history book, play chess, go out and get some exercise," they would rebel like an addict deprived of his heroin.

There is a life principle you must always fol-

low: Never take something away from a baby without giving him something equally interesting. Avoid the vacuum that produces rebellion. Get the order right. You must provide the better alternative before unplugging them from the intravenous entertainment drip....

Rev. Michael Pearl



An Orthodox Parent's Response to TV

This is just one suggestion. All of us need to apply a workable approach with help from our spiritual fathers.

So what is the alternative? How about never plugging them in in the first place?

In his article, Rev. Pearl makes some excellent points. We are indeed living in an electronic age, which, if we are not careful, can take over our life and make our children's lives empty. Watching too much TV, being addicted to computer games, or listening ceaselessly to one's iPod induces a kind of trance-like state, a numbing of the thought processes. We may not realize the damage these activities are doing to our children, for whom, as the author says, "every minute is formative."

As Orthodox Christians, we need to sit down and give a lot of thought and a lot of prayer to the possible effects of the electronic age on our children's lives.

First of all, what do we want most for our children? Certainly, it is for them to be pious, to learn to know our Saviour, and to achieve salvation. Only secondarily do we want them to be good citizens and productive members of society. As for happiness, it comes only from learning to conform one's will to God's and from accepting whatever He sends.

It is vital that childhood be just that—childhood, an uncomplicated time of simplicity and purity. We should strive to keep children from the evil influences of the world until they are prepared to handle them as mature Christians.

With all this in mind, it becomes clear that, as Orthodox Christians in today's world, our children cannot be like other children. This fact—that they will unavoidably be different from their friends (and not conforming is something very hard for children to deal with)—must be explained to them from the very beginning. And they must be taught to see it as a blessing, even if it is difficult. Parents must also explain how important it is to cling to our Faith, which is what causes us to be different.

The best thing is to get rid of the TV before the children are born, and, of course, then they will never miss it. In his article Rev. Pearl says, "Boredom is the mother of creativity," and that is certainly true. When there is a lot of free time, children naturally engage in play and make-believe, and it stimulates their creative abilities. With lots of time to spare and materials at hand, children will let their imaginations run wild and will rarely be bored. They may love spending time outside riding bikes and playing sports. They may become great read-

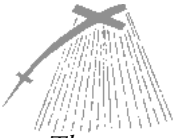
ers. They may build buildings out of blocks. As they grow older, some will build things out of wood. Girls may enjoy playing with dolls or making paper dolls and designing clothing for them. Parents can help by playing with their children, reading to them and taking them to the library, encouraging them to sign up for sports and other activities, and participating in stimulating conversations with them at daily family meals. (Family meals are an important family time.)

"These things may have been possible in the past," you say, "but what can we do now in the electronic age?" Our Faith is the same, children are the same, and our goals as Orthodox Christians are the same. Children don't need TV or iPods or cell phones. They don't need to be constantly watching, listening, texting, etc.—being perpetually stimulated by needless trivia. They need to develop their minds and bodies, and they need instruction in the Faith. Parents should also avoid being unnecessarily plugged-in themselves, since children learn from their parents' example.

At this point, it is necessary to mention computers, since they have become such an integral part of our way of life. From their earliest years, children learn to use a computer and often become more proficient than their parents. Computers are a wonderful educational tool and invaluable for writing. Almost every profession requires computer skills, and whatever you want to know, you will find the computer to be an encyclopedia at your fingertips. But that encyclopedia also contains much that is spiritually harmful.

The family computer should be located in an open area (never in a child's room) where the screen is visible to all. If required, the children can use it for homework or research, but they should be monitored carefully, and their time on the computer limited. Time sending e-mails should be brief. Sites like Facebook should be forbidden and computer games discouraged.

It is essential that every Christian learn to be quiet. This is another vital reason to remain unplugged and away from constant stimulation. To learn to love stillness and being alone is one of the most important things we can teach our children. If they never learn this, how will they learn to pray, and how will they be able to listen to our Saviour? And that is what life is all about—listening to Him, getting to know Him, and loving Him.



About Our Logo
A Divine Confirmation

The cross on our masthead commemorates the miraculous appearance of the sign of the Cross near Athens on Sept. 14 (according to the traditional Orthodox calendar) in 1925. Anti-Orthodox and secularist forces in power in Greece, together with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, had forced the changing of the traditional church calendar in 1924 as a first step toward uniting with the heterodox churches of the West. Shining in the evening sky on the traditional feast day of the Exaltation of the Cross, this extraordinary appearance of the Cross is a divine confirmation of Holy Tradition in the Orthodox Church and of the calendar as one facet of Holy Tradition.

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THE DIOCESE NEEDS SUPPORT

“Every good giving and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17). The perfect gift is the one that only membership in the Church can give: the knowledge of true worship and the grace of the Holy Mysteries. But our era suffers from a famine of truth and the true worship of God. In our weak way, we try to feed those who hunger for God. Your prayers and your donations help the Church in this awe-inspiring ministry. Another way to help is to make a bequest to the Church in your will. Remember that God loves a cheerful giver. Also remember that *The Faithful Steward* is in need of your support.



The Faithful Steward

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